

**STATEMENT OF KATHY BILLINGS, SUPERINTENDENT, ORGAN PIPE CACTUS  
NATIONAL MONUMENT, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT OF THE  
INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS-  
INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the National Park Service (NPS) regarding our responsibility to serve visitors and conserve resources in our national parks along our borders.

The primary mission of the NPS is to conserve the resources of the parks and to promote the use of those parks for the enjoyment of its visitors, leaving them unimpaired for future generations. This core mission of the NPS makes our participation in helping to secure the international borders of our parks imperative, and is our impetus for aggressively addressing border issues.

Cross-border, illegal immigration and other related illegal activities are impacting some of our parks on our international borders, threatening this mission as well as the safety of our visitors employees, and surrounding communities. Increased and focused border enforcement by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) law enforcement agencies in the urban border areas has increasingly driven cross-border violators onto the remote public lands of the NPS and other Federal agencies.

Parks in border areas were established to preserve some of this country's natural and cultural resources which are irreplaceable treasures contained in unique environments. The unchecked movement of significant numbers of humans, vehicle traffic, and contraband across the borders

negatively impacts these resources, causing considerable resource degradation and endangering sensitive or threatened wildlife and plant species. Immigrant trafficking patterns and associated illegal activities impact park lands many miles from the actual borders.

The NPS manages seven national parks along the United States-Mexico border, including Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM) and Coronado National Memorial in Arizona; Amistad National Recreation Area (NRA), Big Bend National Park (NP), Chamizal National Memorial, Palo Alto Battlefield National Historic Site and Padre Island National Seashore (NS) in Texas. The Rio Grande Wild and Scenic River in Texas is also managed by the NPS. These units provide outstanding recreational opportunities to millions of visitors each year and share approximately 365 miles of land that is directly impacted by increased illegal border activity. Big Bend National Park shares 245 miles of border with Mexico, nearly 13 percent of the entire United States-Mexico border.

Our parks on the southwest border are home to many unique natural and cultural resources. There are wide varieties of vegetation and wildlife species including a large number of species designated as threatened or endangered under provisions of the Endangered Species Act. Organ Pipe Cactus N.M. is home to four endangered species, including the Sonoran Pronghorn Sheep, which is considered highly endangered. Foot and vehicle traffic traveling through Sonoran Pronghorn breeding habitat is likely to cause them to move from and/or deny them access to preferred travel corridors. It can also directly damage foraging habitat by crushing vegetation and disrupting the hydrological processes. Additionally, tons of trash and high concentrations of human waste are left behind by immigrants which has significant impacts on water quality,

wildlife, and vegetation. Hundreds of miles of off-road vehicle routes and illegal trails have been created by illegal immigrants, drug smugglers, and associated law enforcement interdiction activities.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has primary responsibility for securing our nation's borders, and we appreciate the efforts they put forth to help secure the nation's parklands and protect irreplaceable resources. Border patrol agents frequently call on NPS rangers who willingly assist when illegal border activities occur on parklands, not only to back them up for officer safety reasons, but to address any resource and visitor protection issues. NPS law enforcement officers have local knowledge, unique skills, and the necessary capabilities to play an integral role in protecting resources, deterring illicit activity, and achieving the "seamless" protection of the borders. The NPS and the DHS have established good lines of communication and cooperation both at the field and headquarters level. Unfortunately, law enforcement operations can have tragic endings. In August 2002, Park Ranger Kris Eggle, working in concert with the U.S. Border Patrol, was shot to death by drug smugglers being pursued by Mexico Federal police across the border into Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument.

The increased border crossing and crime problems in Arizona at Organ Pipe Cactus NM over the last few years are a direct result of DHS Customs and Border Protection's law enforcement successes at the traditional, urban border crossings, which have pushed illegal crossings and crime onto adjacent public land. In light of this situation, efforts on the ground to contend with the rising tide of undocumented immigrants and associated illegal activities such as drug smuggling require ongoing coordination between the NPS and other Federal agencies, especially

the DHS Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Without the cooperative intelligence and robust communication these Federal partners enjoy, we would be unable to shift our tactics as the situation dictates. Unfortunately, the impacts from human and vehicular activity already have caused serious damage to park cultural and natural resources in the border parks.

Effects to the parks and visitors are exacerbated by illegal activities. At Padre Island NS, for example, visitors have encountered evidence of drug smuggling along park beaches. This kind of illegal activity affects parks significantly and can impact the quality of visitor experience.

In Amistad NRA, 12 NPS rangers work closely with U.S. Border Patrol and Immigration and Customs Enforcement, as well as local agencies, to address the escalating impact drug smuggling is having on the NPS mission. One of Amistad's most popular recreational vehicle campgrounds has become a major area for immigrants to gather and a drop-off site for the smuggling of drugs from Mexico. Increased use of popular campgrounds and boat ramps is causing significant concern as immigrants and potentially violent smugglers interact more regularly with visitors and employees.

In 2005, the U.S. Border Patrol and NPS apprehended 6,700 illegal immigrants in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM) alone. Approximately 1,367 of these apprehensions were made by NPS rangers.

The NPS has both the statutory and the fundamental responsibility to ensure that its 390 units are used and enjoyed by the visiting public, well managed, and left unimpaired for future generations. National park rangers are a critical element to this mission and they continue to ensure that a safe and enjoyable experience is provided for all visitors.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other members of the committee may have.